

As It Was Written

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As It Was Written

by [janewithawhy](#)

Summary

Have you ever written letters you were never sure would send?

Notes

Thank you for being here. A word of note before you begin--the number of chapters was a stylistic choice, as was the way of writing. Please take note of each chapter title. If and when you decide to read to the end, it will make sense. I hope you enjoy, and please, find me at janewithawhy.tumblr.com.

Age Four

Dady sed ur still out there some wear. He sed to rite u leddrs and he wood give them to u.

Daddy is in his lab all teh time. He sed he cood tel me y later. He sed to kep riting u lettrs. U can reed it wen he takes em to u.

Daddy said he mite see you soon. I want to see you to.

Daddy always looks tired. He told me a secret. He has a surprize for me. Does he have a surprize for you to? Are you the surprize?

Age Five

Daddy showed me what he's always working on today. It's called my wedding dress. I don't like the sound of it. He said he has other things to tell me. More secrets. Are all secrets scary?

Dear Imouto,

Daddy keeps saying that I'm going to have a big kid's job to do soon. I can handle a big kid's job! Maybe, when we see each other again we can both do the big kid's job. Then it won't seem like such a big kid's job.

*Love,
Satsuki*

Dear Imouto,

Where do you go to school? Can you come to school with me?! Daddy says we can't go to school together. He says to stop asking about you out loud. I don't get it?

*Love,
Satsuki*

Dear Imouto,

I have a big kid's job now.

*Love,
Satsuki*

Dear Imouto,

A girl named Nonon is my friend at school. She is my only friend at school. She talks different. Everyone talks different. Teacher says I talk like an adult. Do I?

*Love,
Satsuki*

Age Six

Dear Imouto,

Dad never took my letters to you. Where do I send this so you get it?

*Love,
Satsuki*

Dear Imouto,

I could get Nonon to help me. I don't know how much help I'll need. Two little kids for one big kid job might work. Soroi is maybe too old to help.

*Love,
Satsuki*

Dear Imouto,

I'm not like the other kids in my class. I have to do a big kid's job. Dad said I could do it. He's right. A big kid's job seems scary. It wouldn't be so big or so scary if you were here. I'll think about it not being scary. It seems far away. I'm in a skyscraper up above. I'm looking down at it. It seems so small. It's not scary anymore.

*Love,
Satsuki*

Dear Imouto,

Can you read my letters yet?

*Love,
Satsuki*

Age Seven

Dear Dad,

I miss you. Is my little sister okay? I miss the sound of you at your desk in your lab all the time. A lot of people said you were in an accident. But you said I would see my imouto someday. You must be coming back for that. I didn't cry because you must be coming back for that. Sometimes Soroi pats me on the head like you did.

*Love,
Satsuki*

Dear Imouto,

The other kids still don't like me. I think they're afraid of me. Nonon isn't afraid of me. She follows me around and makes the other kids listen to what I say. There's not a lot to say. But they listen anyway. Nonon makes them listen anyway. The teacher always tells me to turn my frown upside down. I think she means that I should smile. Smiling should happen when we are happy. What is there to be happy about?

*Love,
Satsuki*

Dear Imouto,

I don't like calling her Mama anymore.

*Love,
Satsuki*

Age Eight

Two pages were torn away leaving a jagged edge in the centerfold.

Age Nine

There are multiple pages missing, here. But one damaged triangle, still hanging between one year and the next, remained suspended.

De

*I'm s
maybe if
I don't kn
that doesn't
even if I let h*

I'm sorry.

*Love,
Satsuki*

Age Ten

Dear Imouto,

I'm glad you never had to live with her.

*Love,
Satsuki*

Age Eleven

Dear Father,

Why did you leave me with her? Why couldn't you have taken both of us? Was it because I wasn't good enough? Is that why you saved my imouto instead of me? You told me what to do but why does it have to be me by myself? Did you really take her? Should I have cried when they said you were in an accident? Were you in an accident? Maybe it's time to stop pretending that you're coming back.

-Satsuki

Dear Imouto,

Writing letters to you makes my life feel less weird. I don't know how to explain it but it helps me calm down and helps me focus. Nonon might be going to a different middle school. I can't tell her where I'll be going. I have a feeling she'll follow me. If she does she can help me with what I need to do. If she doesn't then I can't use her. But I think she's smart enough to know why. I can't just tell her. She needs to come on her own. If she volunteers then I can trust her. I know you want to know what it is but maybe it's better if I don't write it down. Mother doesn't really pay attention to me anyway... except when she wants to or needs to. I don't want to talk about that but she might pay more attention to me than I think she does. She introduced me to somebody today. She said that this girl was my sister but her name is different. Her name is Nui Harime. She is not you. She is nothing like I imagine you would be. She is younger than you but there is something different about her. Something not good. There are a lot of not good things in the world. But Nonon is here to be my friend and I have letters to write to you. Outside of this, the world isn't that bad. Would you think the world was bad? If I was around I would hope you wouldn't.

*Love,
Satsuki*

Dear Imouto,

Nonon and I were on our way home from school. It was the middle of the afternoon and the birds were chirping loudly but not in an annoying way. It was actually beautiful. At least, that's what I think the meaning of beauty might be. When things aren't so hard or different than what they are. But I have a reputation to keep up. That reputation does not include appreciating the way that birds chirp. I'm probably not making sense. Father said I'd be able to see you again all those years ago. Was he using a metaphor? I hate that it's taken me so long to ask that question. I haven't heard from him since the accident. I had hope but maybe

hoping isn't the best use of my time. I don't know if either of you are alive anymore. I haven't told Nonon this. She might think I'm crazy because I keep writing you letters you won't ever read. Is there a heaven? Can you read in heaven? Can you read my letters to you? If I put your name at the top do they get to heaven somehow? I don't even know what name to give you. Father never said. I would never ask mother. I can ask questions but I will never get an answer.

Our mother is not like other mothers. She is not a good mother, but I can't let her find that I've said this or written these things down. I just want to let you know, in case you are wishing you could have been here. Maybe it's better that you're not.

*Love,
Satsuki*

Age Twelve

Dear Imouto,

She did it. Nonon followed me where she did not think that I would go. I think that I can trust her. I think that she would understand what I have to do. I said that this was a job for a big kid. This is not a job for a big kid. This is a job for an adult. I am not an adult but I resolve to be an adult anyway. I will act like an adult and I will be respected as an adult. I wish I could tell you why. I can't really say much except that she wants to change the world and not in a good way.

The world she wants to change it into is not a world that I would want to write to you about. The way the world is right now is worth telling you about someday. It's a funny thought but maybe there is a place and a time where we can meet between life and death.

You can tell me about death. And I will tell you about life.

*Love,
Satsuki*

Dear Father,

I want you to know that I am doing this on my own. You may have given me the ideas but I am the one who is acting. I am twelve years old father. Are you proud of me now?

-Satsuki

Dear Imouto,

These idiots are weak. I know that I'm unusual for a twelve year old but I expected more of this school. There is still one that might be useful but he is like a giant stone. Both in looks and personality. Maybe I could take advantage of that.

I don't want to take advantage of people. Some of them can be kind and good. But they won't matter in a changed world. I want to keep our world like this. I want you to look at it the way I have looked at it. You can clean away the dirt. Not everybody is a pig. But many are. Too many pigs lined up for the butcher and they don't know it. There might be a lot of bad Imouto but there is a lot of good. There are things that are worth protecting even if nobody else thinks so.

Maybe that's why I still write these letters. Maybe not for you but so I can remember that there are things that are good. But that's selfish. I want to remember that things are good so you won't think that I was angry and sad in my life.

I think we'll meet again. I hope we'll meet again.

*Love,
Satsuki*

Dear Imouto,

People can surprise you and sometimes you should let them.

*Love,
Satsuki*

Age Thirteen

Dear Imouto,

We don't get to go to the beach that much. Mother wants me to have kind of a normal life so she lets me take days "off" with Nonon. How do I describe the beach to somebody who's never seen it? It's a place by the ocean and it's covered in sand. And the ocean is just a huge body of water and the sand is ground up little bits of rock. But saying it like that takes some of the magic away from those places.

I read somewhere that we know more about the moon than we do about the ocean. There are scary looking creatures when we get deep enough to explore and they can't bring those creatures back up to the surface. They never make it up alive.

I always found that a little weird. It makes sense from a scientific point of view but it's still strange. At the bottom of the ocean there's so much pressure that these creatures basically have no bones but they die when you bring them up into areas with less pressure. Suddenly the weight of the world is lifted off of their shoulders and they die from relief.

Nonon says I think too much about things like this and that the connections I make are always so dark. I know she's teasing but there is some truth I guess.

Why do I even write these things?

Love,
Satsuki

Dear Imouto,

I don't know if they have weather wherever "heaven" is. Most people hate the rain but the first rain of the season is always comforting to me. The way it hits against a windowpane in a large empty house? Maybe I'm strange for finding comfort in the hollow sound it makes.

There are things that mother says and does that frighten me. She doesn't treat me like a daughter but I guess that can't be helped. She sees me as a failure and doesn't mind telling me that but she always says she has plans for me. Mother thinks that I don't have plans of my own. I don't want to let that woman scare me. She manages everything about my life and I have to... I have to "please" her if I'm going to do what I have to do.

I let her do things I know are wrong and maybe that makes me wrong. But I know that being afraid of her isn't a sign of weakness. I'm just trying to do what I know is right. What I think is right. I'm under her thumb and I'm sure she thinks that I am weak but I have more resolve than she pays attention to.

I am afraid but someday I will be free. Despite my fear, I find hope, and through that hope, I will welcome freedom. I am afraid because I know she is wrong, and in my fear, I know that I am still free, that I still have my own will. Fear is freedom, if only I remember that my fear means that I am still me.

*Love,
Satsuki*

Dear Imouto,

I know that I can trust Jakuzure and Gamagoori. Gamagoori Ira is the immovable stone that I was impressed with at this school last year. He's some character but he takes his duties very seriously. I think others would laugh at him but I appreciate his usefulness and dedication too much.

Friends... friends... Nonon and I are friends. I think. I... I have to admit that becoming friends with people isn't something that I know how to do. It's easier for me to think about my mission and see everybody as a pawn but I would be lying if I said that that didn't make me feel different from everybody. Sometimes I think about the way other girls my age act and what they do when they have days off with their friends or where they go after school. Sometimes I think about how they must go home to families and brothers and sisters and parents who did not lie to them.

Lying is when somebody says something that is not true. I've heard the saying that truth is subjective. How can both statements exist?

*Love,
Satsuki*

Father, I am thirteen. I am tired.

Did you not take me because I was already ruined?

*I do not know with what eyes I could look
upon my father when I die and go
under the earth, nor yet my wretched mother—
those two to whom I have done things deserving*

worse punishment than hanging.

-Oedipus Rex, Sophocles

Dear Imouto,

There was an incident at the company today and Mother decided to “dispatch” me so that I could take care of it. This isn’t the first time she’s sent me to do something like this. There will be... many more people I will have to “dispatch” before they are the last.

Inumuta Houka...

I took a look into his file and found that his file changed often. What a smart young man. What a selfish young man. He’ll take time convincing, but I can use his skills. I told mother I would find a place for him for our cause.

Words are silly things, Imouto.

*Love,
Satsuki*

Age Fourteen

Dear Imouto,

What would we be like if we grew up together? Would we be happy? Would our parents be different? Would we both have this job?

I write these letters like you're real and I'm sending them in the mail but I'm not crazy. I know they don't reach you. I know. I don't know why I write you questions like I would expect to get an answer.

*Love,
Satsuki*

Dear Imouto,

Mother caught me laughing the other day.

I didn't mean to do it. There's a certain way that she expects me to act and there's a certain way that I must comply. Laughter is supposed to be simple, something you don't even think of doing: something nobody in my year has to think about not doing.

Jakuzure told a simple joke. It was funny. She's become (I believe the word is) snarky, in past few years. Sure, it was at the expense of Inumuta, but it was too true and too funny. Sometimes I feel like the temperature of my body drops as soon as I set foot in my own home, but with Jakuzure by my side, the faintest, slightest chuckle escaping from my lips... it felt like I was just 14, coming home to change, maybe to be greeted by you. I think of our father on the landing, trying to figure out why we're so happy. He doesn't question it...

Nui was there instead. And she looked at me before she went back into the house and suddenly mother was there frowning. Soroi had his day off. I had to tell Jakuzure that she had to go home. She gave me one of those pitying looks before she left. As much as I enjoy her friendship, I sometimes hate the way she looks at me, expecting me to spill all of my secrets.

Some secrets I'd rather not tell her.

Some secrets she's safer by not knowing.

Some secrets must be kept, even from you.

Even from me.

*Love,
Satsuki*

Written in the center margins, butted up against the centerfold, a tiny haiku is misplaced between pages.

*I will defy her
serpentine touch against me.
This I promise you.*

Dear Imouto,

Do you think, when we meet, you'll be able to tell me that you understood why I had to act the way that I did?

Or will you avoid my eyes like the rest of my classmates?

*Love,
Satsuki*

Dear Imouto,

She's become more... forceful, recently. Maybe she expects that I'm as rebellious as my age determines I should be. Or maybe she's become frustrated with her own plans and uses me as... a sort of punching bag.

Either way, she's been more aggravated than usual. But still. I let her do what she does because there are things in this world that are worth more than me, worth more than her. I know those things. I've felt those things. Those things are important and will no longer exist if I do not stop her.

The subjugation of myself for the eventual liberation of the world seems like a small price to pay in the context of things. If one person gives up a lot for the freedom of others is that not enough? But I'm not exactly a martyr. I continue this path for a very specific reason.

I suppose, though, that reason is you. I can choose to be good or evil at any point... but if we speak, when we speak, wouldn't you rather I be good? Wouldn't you rather that I enjoyed my time living, so that I could tell you about the way certain things felt, than have us meet with stifled, angry conversation?

If I am good, will we get more time? If I am bad, will we get less?

I subject myself for the sake of something better. If I hold onto that thought during, it gives me strength to get through.

In subjugation, there is the promise of liberation.

*Love,
Satsuki*

Dear Imouto,

Soroi looks at me like he knows my secrets and I wish I could tell him. He's not as frail as you would think, looking at him. His heart is kind and warm and his hand never harms when he places it against my shoulder. I'm too tall for him to pat me on the head anymore.

Still, sometimes I see him talk to his nephew, another friend of mine, and before he glances up at me, I see him smile sadly.

I have this dream... or maybe it's a memory. I'm young, very young. The house is cold and empty. I'm barefoot and walking through a part I don't recognize and... and I'm crying? I think I'm rubbing at my eyes and everything in my body aches and suddenly Soroi is there, lit in pale orange, the wick of his candle flickering as he walks towards me. I put my arms out and he scoops me up.

That's it. That's the memory. Sometimes he hands me my cup of tea in the morning, and as his hands move to give me the cup and saucer, I see them reaching out to hold me.

*Love,
Satsuki*

*So he endured to be the priest
In that child-slaughtering rite unblest,
The first full offering of that host
In fatal war for a bad woman lost.
-The Sacrifice of Iphigenia, Aeschylus*

Age Fifteen

Dear Imouto,

The academy will be complete soon.

Inumuta asks if I am excited, I think he has too much fun collecting data on me. I give him the answers he might deem interesting. He may be smart, but he is also predictable. Some people live selfishly. It would be unfair for me to say that Inumuta is selfish, but so far, he has lived selfishly—fleeing from his parents, changing his credentials, exploiting superficial corporations for his own monetary benefit. Admittedly, I find his efforts admirable, but he can do more than change the stock market.

I'll drag some good out of him yet.

I have heard them whisper a nickname for me, those students that I pass in the hallway. Steel Queen. Let them whisper.

*Love,
Satsuki*

Dear Imouto,

Physical training is just as important as mental preparation, which is why I tend to go on long morning runs to do both.

Just a lot of cold air and solitude and nobody to glance at me or touch me or think of me in their terms. It's just the steady, constant rhythm of my feet against the ground—a rhythm so consistent I'm sure even Jakuzure could compose to it. She writes music, you know. I don't think I ever told you. She writes wonderful music, beautiful melodies and harmonies with soothing beats... at least they all sound wonderful to me. Admittedly, I'm a little tone deaf. I think it upsets her, sometimes. Not that I could change it. I'm sure her music is more masterful than anybody our age or older, but I think she wishes my sense of hearing was as sharp as anything else about me.

Everybody needs validation. It's not bad to need that. Some people just need more validation than others. Some people require the validation of certain other people. Jakuzure is one of those people, though she'll deny if ever asked.

Do I require validation?

I will get my validation—in that space between living and dying, when we meet. I'll get my validation.

*Love,
Satsuki*

Dear Imouto,

I'm sorry for the lack of words, recently. An academy without students is a castle without a guard, so we had to seek out some... recruits. It was easy enough, but easy is not what I needed. I needed loyal and there's nothing but loyalty to be had when in the Kanto region.

There, we found recruits and a leader amongst them. He's rough and unpolished, but he's worked hard and cares about honor, loyalty, things that we also care about. And he'll bring the forces that we need to the academy.

Loyalty over bravery. Bravery is foolish and impulsive. Loyalty listens, obeys, adapts to a set of rules laid out by a superior.

I would rather be seen as loyal to my mission than brave for my actions.

*Love,
Satsuki*

For some reason, there are a number of blank pages between one entry and the next. There's one page, however, in the middle, folded in half.

*The Bacchae, Euripides (405 B.C. ??)
Lysistrata, Aristophanes (411 B.C. ??)
The Art of War, Sun Tzu (1913)
Animal Farm, George Orwell (1945)
Confessions of a Mask, Yukio Mishima (1949)
The Bell Jar, Sylvia Plath (1963)*

*A different story—
though yours will benefit from
what was left behind.*

Age Sixteen

Dear Imouto,

It's mostly a symbol of status and power, but the tower at Honnouji Academy serves a few different functions. Firstly, it reinforces, in mother's eyes, the idea that I am carrying out her will. A child of Kiryuuin Ragyo would dictate from no other spot than the highest tower. It's a visual metaphor for my presidential status. Something I'm sure she would appreciate, that she exploits personally.

Secondly, and this is something I've not told anybody about the construction of the school, it's sort of a self-preservation thing. Jakuzure, as my oldest friend, knows much but also very little about me. It's the way that it needs to be, I guess. She knows, of course, what we intend to carry out, but she's so much safer if she's spared the unnecessary details. If everyone is spared the unnecessary details. In this tower, I am inaccessible, as it should be.

Thirdly, it's... pretty. The view, I mean, not the tower itself. The tower is menacing, ugly, a gash in the sky above the academy. But standing on top of it, the way the sky looks, painted so many colors during either a sunrise or sunset? Most people think that both look the same, but there are more oranges and yellows in a sunrise and more purples and deep reds in a sunset. To me, sunsets feel warmer and even though they give way to darkness, there's something very peaceful in that hour of fading light.

What is it like, wherever you are? Does time pass? Are the days marked by the sun rising or setting?

I wonder how many shades of red I could name to you.

*Love,
Satsuki*

Dear Imouto,

The banter between Uzu Sanageyama (the loyal, but brash troublemaker we, as Jakuzure says, "picked up" from Kanto) and Jakuzure seems to be giving Gamagoori headaches, lately. When I asked him about it he said that they "argue like children in a playground". I remember he folded his arms across his chest as he looked at them. The next time they argued, he physically removed one from the other.

I almost laughed.

Children in a playground.

We deserved to be just children in a playground.

*Love,
Satsuki*

Dear Imouto,

I fear these letters to you make me sound as if I'm sad all the time. I'm not. I'm focused, yes, but not sad. Not really, anyway. There's plenty to be sad about, but there's also a lot of things to appreciate. There are plenty of things to look at and be grateful for in the land of the living.

Friends, warm blankets, crisp air, long summer days, the bitterness of my favorite tea—do you think that's telling? That I like the bitterness of this tea? It used to be too harsh, but I was obedient as ever and tried to enjoy it and now—now I do enjoy it. It's comforting; it's familiar.

Some things we take on because they're thrust upon us. If we stumble under the weight of those things, we turn towards darkness. But if we overcome those things, and make them our own...

Well. I guess I still have to see where that takes me.

*Love,
Satsuki*

On the bottom of the page, errantly drawn, a stray flock of birds takes flight into the crease.

Dear Imouto,

I look at people and I find their affections for one another endearing, even in the subtle ways that they express their mutual appreciation of one another. Take Jakuzure and Sanageyama, for example. They still bicker (less so, with Gamagoori walking around), but they respect one another. I think they've even become friends... in an odd sort of way.

Cutting remarks are softened by cheeky grins. Physical training is competitive as ever but afterwards, a stray pat on the back is never missed. Even at important meetings the pair seem to be able to support one another even if they're throwing verbal volleys the next minute.

It's endearing. I don't have the privilege of acting that way towards them. I offer what I can—misplaced half-smiles of approvals, silent nods of affirmation, pleased hums when solutions

are adequate—but anything above that is... lacking. It's not that they aren't my friends. They are. I just... I just don't quite understand how to properly act with the people I care about.

Save for, maybe, writing them letters they may or may not read.

Sometimes, I am jealous of the things I missed out on, but if I lack now for the future of myself and others, than that's a chance I'm willing to take.

*Love,
Satsuki*

Dear Imouto,

Controlling a prestigious academy while attending said academy is not without it's difficulties. Not without it's social difficulties, at least. Delinquents, spies, defectors... the defectors are the worse to deal with. Spies are fine; it means we're doing our job right. But defectors?

Not only do they lack loyalty, but they're the type of people to escape with their tails between their legs and reproduce horror stories about what goes on here. Tarnish on our reputation and all that.

There are, admittedly, questionable guidelines... but all within reason. Within what little reason of this game there exists. I've told you before—I don't want to use people, but people are the best tool. They're malleable and predictable and taking advantage of that is necessary. Right? It's all necessary. I don't want to take advantage of people but I do what I have to. If I fail, it won't matter what they will have thought of me. It only matters that I succeed. When that happens, then they can sort out the truths from my contradictions.

*Love,
Satsuki*

Age Seventeen

These letters are stupid and foolish. I keep them like a child.

But they're all I have left of some memory I'm not even sure is real.

*How happy is the blameless vestal's lot!
The world forgetting, by the world forgot.
Eternal sunshine of the spotless mind!
Each prayer accept'd, each wish resign'd.*

-Alexander Pope

Dear Imouto,

The rest of the page is blank, but wrinkled and slightly browned, smelling faintly of tea.

Dear Imouto,

There's a western fairy tale about a princess trapped in a castle and guarded by a dragon. In some variations, she's kept in the highest tower and probably subsists on magic alone. Sometimes, she is kidnapped by the dragon, but in some variations her own parents put her there. A princess, trapped in the highest tower, kept there by a dragon.

I wonder where the inspiration for such tales come from, but I suppose that all myths and fables are grounded in some sort of shared human experience. Am I saying that I am a princess? No, though I have heard them mutter heiress and the like when they think that I am not paying attention. Perhaps they think that I am the dragon, but often... often I feel as though I am kept here in the highest tower.

I am not waiting for a knight to save me. I am merely waiting for my chance to slay the dragon.

-Satsuki

*falling sick on a journey
my dream goes wandering
over a field of dried grass*

-Matsuo Bashō

Imouto,

I hate the sad way Soroi looks at me. Everything Shirou cuts scratches against my skin. I hate the way Jakuzure tries to comfort me by placing her hand against my arm like I need saving. I hate the incessant clacking of Inumuta's keys. I hate how Sanageyama looks at me expectantly every morning, like everything I say, the moment I say it, is true and good and part of a plan that has no chance of falling apart.

Somedays I don't know. Most days I'm not sure. What's even real? What are my chances? Inumuta inputs data but results are always inconclusive—"We won't know until we engage."

Why me?

-Satsuki

I should just let her do what she wants, I already have anyway.

Thinking like this means she's already won.

Don't be so pathetic.

Dear Imouto,

My anger and bitterness does nothing for us. It steals time, but it doesn't provide it.

I think my grades took a slight dive, but I'm still besting Inumuta (the page is streaked, slightly and the ink has dried in runs and small droplets, the edges of certain characters having dried in pools that resemble snow flakes) and on top of all of our endeavors. I suppose I was going to rebel against myself eventually.

Better now than when it really matters.

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

*All my love,
Satsuki*

Age Eighteen

Dear Imouto,

Bar any hindrances, this will be the year.

*Love,
Satsuki*

Dear Imouto,

I'm intrigued by this transfer student that's appeared. She's abrasive and cumbersome, headstrong, and lacks finesse, but... but she exhibits certain strengths. Her own mission is compromised by her emotions and though I do have the details she so seeks, I know little else of how she is involved.

Matoi Ryuko. There's something about her...

But she is a distraction and she will assimilate into this school soon enough. I think she's around the age you would be, today. Perhaps you would be better mannered than she is, though.

*Love,
Satsuki*

Along one margin is the sketch of a cage.

*Steel Queen. Steel Queen.
That name seems to follow me everywhere.*

Dear Imouto,

This Matoi Ryuko is getting on my last nerve. I'll admit that I have a certain amount of pride for being the very best, but that's because I absolutely need to be the very best. It's a necessity for my mission and because it is a necessity for my mission, it is a necessity for my entire life, since that mission and the duty that I serve have been my whole life...

A Kamui. I'll admit I'm surprised, but how dare she? I stress that there is something clouding her judgment, this anger and hate that she so harbors. It would be easy, entirely too easy in fact, to tell her outright that I know the bearer of the second half of her scissor, but that is a secret I am willing to keep. I have yet to figure out if she has a "side" and somebody as—admittedly—powerful as she could either be a great asset or a remarkable disaster for our cause. It's much too risky to bank on a guess.

For now, she's a headache.

*Love,
Satsuki*

Dear Imouto,

Our redemption draws ever closer. Almost everything is set in place and yet...

And yet, I feel an odd sort of emptiness, a hollowness that I've been trying so hard to quell for so many years. That's the only way I know how to describe it: a hollowness; an empty cavity somewhere inside of me that's supposed to house something. Someone. Anything but myself, perhaps.

It's an unnecessary distraction, anyway. There's much more at stake than just... affection. Or, at least, my own affections. Those things can and should come, but later. Once I'm sure such an indulgence is a luxury I can afford, then I'll have time (then I'll make time), and then I will tell you about the one unconquered territory on the map of my existence.

I don't think I've ever allowed myself to look forward to something, but I guess writing it down makes it fully apparent that I've somehow missed out on the things most people my age would have had at least a little experience with, by now. I wonder, you know.

Sometimes I see Inumuta and Shirou sneak glances at one another during meetings. Not the kind they'll sneak to one another when I share some vital information that they know to act upon, but something different. Something whole and kind and safe.

Something I don't really know much about, but want to find out.

*Love,
Satsuki.*

If anything were to happen to me, I've instructed Soroi to burn these pages. Perhaps then, these words will finally reach you in the smoke that will carry all this ink.

Dear Imouto,

I can't believe this idiot is a real person.

*Love,
Satsuki*

Dear Imouto,

Ryuko will make everything fall apart if she keeps acting in this insolent, foolish way—she has no hold on her emotions, nothing to control or reign in the skill that she does possess, making her volatile but predictable and an easy target for people like Harime.

That idiot will get herself killed. She played right into Harime's hand and went on a complete rampage, which, of course, Harime found nothing short of exciting. The destructive, take-over power of the Kamui made it self known completely and I thought I was going to have to end the whole debacle by taking Ryuko's life.

Stupid, foolish girl. She can't play games like this, otherwise she will force my hand and I will have to deal with her the way nuisances like her are supposed to be dealt with at Honnouji.

If it weren't for that friend of hers, Mako Mankanshoku...

I'm not sure what I would have done.

*Love,
Satsuki*

Dear Imouto,

Keeping tabs on Harime shouldn't be on the list of things I need to take care of on top of everything else on my agenda, but I had a bad feeling about her intentions after I told her not to interfere with events taking place on my territory. That one will always find loopholes to get what she wants.

I'm glad I followed her, though—as I suspected, Ryuko was, once again, predictable in her ridiculous nature. She has good intentions, a slight hero-complex, and an overbearing sense of confidence that's more than irksome, but she has a good heart. And I can't overlook that. I'm trying, but I think even Jakuzure is starting to get suspicious of my leniency towards the

transfer student. I keep giving her second chances and I'm not sure why. I've dealt with more skilled defectors and more charming spies and this "Neanderthal", as Jakuzure calls her, seems to be... seems to be getting on my good side. Or, at least, my side.

I stepped in when it was convenient for me to do so and at the last possible moment. Her Kamui has been seized and she can be dealt with when we get back from our excursion. I could have let Harime take care of her. Just hesitate a single second longer and a nuisance would be gone, completely. But Harime lifted her hand, told Ryuko to join her father and I... I couldn't help it.

And maybe a part of me is only as old as my age and maybe there are things that I've tried to stifle for too long and maybe the nickname Steel Queen sometimes grates against my nerves more than it should, but I'm not all hardened metal, hammered out again and again. So I did a stupid thing.

I could have left her there, pathetic as she was, more punishment for her brashness, but then I would be no better than any other run of the mill villain. I am not a villain and she can still be useful. I left a part of her Kamui with her, a test to see if she would have the strength to find the rest of the pieces, to see if that good heart of hers could be trusted.

The extra blanket to the situation was just... I don't know. I'm not sure why I did it.

*Love,
Satsuki*

The handwriting of this letter is more unstable than any letter prior to it, as if a shaking, nervous, tired hand had written it.

Dear Imouto,

That girl is a force to be reckoned with.

I was dueled to a draw, but before that draw, I pictured the moment she would do it and I thought of the suspended place where we would meet, and I admit that, for that brief second, I wanted her to do it. I thought that I had come far enough. That I had fought long enough. That it was time to see you.

But I have more resolve than to take the easy way out. "You are alone," she said to me. The whole day was a reminder of the necessary sacrifices I make to accomplish my goals, but for some reason, when she said it...

She threw Bakuzan back at me: a gesture of trust or foolishness?

"The Kiryuuin Satsuki I know..."

Her voice still rings in my ears. Matoi Ryuko knows nothing of me.

The only one who knows such truths, is you.

*Love,
Satsuki*

*My life,
How much more of it remains?
The night is brief.
-Masaoko Shiki*

Dear Imouto,

If this is the last letter I write to you, then perhaps I will be able to apologize in spirit.

The story of thirteen years will come to a close tomorrow if everything goes according to plan. What kind of end does this story hold? We are prepared. But I am still scared. I am still afraid of her. My fear means that I am still me, so my fear is freedom! I will betray her in that last, open moment and to that extent, my subjugation is liberation! And at last, everything I've said will be understood... my contradictions are truth.

But why do I still feel as though I am twelve years old, in this moment, writing to you? Why do I feel like I am ten? Why do I feel like I am five, like father should step through the door at any moment, holding you, telling me that I was having a terrible, terrible dream?

What foolishness.

Imouto, tomorrow I will kill our mother as she once killed you. As she once killed me, perhaps.

And if I don't? Do you think that in the space between one world and the next, you'll be able to tell me the name you grew up with, wherever you were?

*All my love,
Satsuki*

*And you, my father; there on the sad height,
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.*

*Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.*

-Dylan Thomas

Age Twenty-Two

Dear Ryuko,

Finally, a name to put atop all these letters.

You're in the kitchen, now, making a mess—I'm sure of it. I can hear you cursing over the sound of a blender. Admittedly, it puts a smile on my face.

Things did not go the way I'd so hoped, nearly four years ago. In the aftermath, I'd forgotten all about these letters and their contents. Even now, I can't seem to recall when I'd found so much time to just write things down. Evidently, I found the time, as this notebook is thick with ink and proof of my actions.

Where did all the time go? I graduated, then you graduated, then you moved in, then I graduated again and somehow, here we are. It's not purgatory that we're spending all of our time in, telling each other about the worlds we lived in apart from one another. It's the apartment we share in the city. You're graduating again, tomorrow. You once confided in me that you never thought you'd get this far in your education.

It's strange, the way life works out, isn't it?

You've kept the last name. I would ask why, but I think I already know the answer. Is there something that you hope for, Matoi? I'd give it to you. Gladly. But give me time. There are years and years that I still feel the need to scrub out of myself...

And all of this? It's complicated (writes the girl who made a 13 year plan to save this Earth and everyone on it). Perhaps now, fear is just fear. No plan, no contradictions, just me being afraid of what could happen instead of what has happened.

Thank you, for that, you know? I didn't know how to look forward to something until you taught me.

There's so much I look forward to, with you. So much that I'm glad to be given the chance at.

Someday, I will have an answer for the question that hides behind your eyes, and at the end of your name, and in your signature, and in the lingering way you stand so close. I will have an answer for us.

*All my love,
Satsuki*

Epilogue

Ryuko brushed the strand of red away from her eyes as she closed the notebook with a sigh, holding it against her chest. Flattening her palm against the cover, she felt the softened, black leather against her fingertips. She was sitting cross-legged on the floor, surrounded by opened boxes, some of which half empty, contents strewn about and waiting to be placed in their new homes. Everything was in disarray around her, but after reading, she felt a sense of completeness settle into her bones, like gravity kicking in and tying her to this world. She opened the notebook again and leafed through the pages, slightly yellowed by time, corners soft and smooth from being tousled so much in its existence. Her nose picked up the faint scent of old paper, like a library or a used bookstore, and hints of lavender.

Her ears perked up at the sound of footsteps behind her and she turned her head, catching sight of Satsuki, barefoot, carrying two mugs of tea in one hand and a plate of sliced peaches in the other. Her sister set everything on the ground and sat behind Ryuko, resting her chin on the younger woman's shoulder so that she could take a peek at the contents of the pages below.

"My writing was atrocious," she said, crinkling her nose.

Ryuko looked down, her hand having stopped at one of the first few pages. There big, sloppy characters shakily written out were swathed across the page, the columns all of varying sizes.

"It's like I had no concept of spatial awareness," Satsuki continued, mirth in her voice. She reached out and touched her slender finger to the characters written on those pages, tracing them lightly. One Satsuki connected to another through time and space, past and present. The first was alone and small, awkwardly holding a brush in her hand, brows furrowed in concentration. The second was very much not alone and when she lifted her finger off of the page the connection dropped and the first was lost forever in a memory, driftwood down a blackened river.

"You were like, five," Ryuko said with a snort.

"I was better at speech making than writing," Satsuki said, turning her head ever so slightly to brush her lips against Ryuko's cheek. "Then, anyway."

"Well, yea. Makes sense. Most people don't know how to write until they're five, so writing's gotta catch up to your talkin'," Ryuko shrugged. She frowned when Satsuki turned her attention back to the pages in her hands. She wanted to ask something about its contents but she didn't know how.

"When did you get so smart?"

"Oh, can it. I've always been smart. And that's not smart; that's common sense, stupid."

Satsuki hummed in response.

She never had a habit of reading the letters after she finished them and honestly didn't know how much was laid down in ink, there. Once she'd written them, she "sent" them. Though they belonged in the book that belonged to her, she always felt that they were never hers to go back and read. Truly, she could only really remember a handful of times where she had sat down and written in it. Most of those memories were from the more recent past, the shallow depths of her memory, but there were others she remembered if she swam down deep enough.

It surprised her when Ryuko pulled it out of the box and held it up curiously, her hair in a ponytail, red streak stuck to her forehead, sticky with sweat. She could never remember packing it, but somehow, it always ended up wherever she went. Attached wasn't exactly the right word for it—the notebook seemed to make itself known to her opportunistically in her life. Sometimes a few months would go by before she made a new entry. It'd been years since, and they'd moved twice now, and yet there Ryuko stood, one hand on her hip, the other holding it up questioningly, letters finally delivered.

"The heck is this?" she'd asked, grin playing on her lips. "Gushy journal? All your love notes?"

"Oh. Letters," Satsuki said, simply. She'd gone back to unpacking a box of carefully wrapped dishware without a second thought, but Ryuko didn't want to let it go.

"Don't people usually send letters?" she'd asked, and for some reason, Satsuki felt a faint smile tug at the corner of her lips. In that moment, she felt like a wave was about to break and there was nothing she could do but let it wet the shore.

"I never had an address to send them to."

"You wrote a bunch of letters to somebody you didn't know the address to?"

She'd looked up from the box then and nodded, a slight lift in her shoulders.

"That doesn't make any sense," Ryuko had said, flipping the notebook over and looking at it. "Who writes letters to somebody they don't have the address for?" Suddenly, a grin formed on her lips. "I should pull the younger sister card and read through your stupid journal."

Satsuki had chuckled then. "You can read it."

"It's less fun when I'm given permission. Why're you being so cool about this?"

"Well," Satsuki started. Suddenly, she was bashful and a faint blush spread across her cheeks. This was the wave breaking against the shore. "They're all your letters anyway."

The air changed, in that moment. Sand darkened, the wind shifted—something happened as Ryuko turned the book over in her hands, gently running her finger along the softened spine. Satsuki had gotten up and took it from her before untying the cover. She'd cracked the spine open, rifled the pages like wafting the present into the past, handed the book back to Ryuko, and continued to unpack.

Which brought them to the present: Satsuki's body slotted behind Ryuko's, chin resting on her shoulder. Ryuko was just flipping through pages, looking at the evolution of Satsuki's writing, admiring how everything became more and more refined as she flipped page after page, year after year. She was thinking about the questions she wanted to ask but didn't quite know how and Satsuki was feeling the waves retreat from the shore, ebbing back into the ocean, memories of her self surfacing, breaking, then retreating back into her.

"Nee-san," Ryuko whispered, tentative, her hand stilling the pages, letting the book fall open somewhere between sixteen and seventeen. Satsuki gave another hum that reverberated through both their bodies. "How did—how'd you know that this world was so good?"

"What do you mean?" Satsuki asked, slightly taken aback by the question.

Ryuko squirmed and then shifted her body so that she could look at Satsuki. She craned her neck back and then scooted slightly, but they still sat on the floor, tangled close, Satsuki's thigh against Ryuko's back.

"You had every reason to hate everything here," Ryuko said after some time. She flitted her fingers through her sister's bangs. "But you still thought this world was good and you wanted to save it. How did you know it was good?"

Satsuki thought for a moment, letting Ryuko's fingers drag gently across her skin. A wave swelled up, surged inside of her as she searched for her answer, bigger than before—it reached its crest, then folded in on itself. All of her memories, of the years now past, circled in and then broke onto one another.

"Because of you," she said, quietly. She leaned back and propped herself up, hands bracing her torso. "I thought that you were still alive for years and the thought of meeting you fueled me, but then I got more disillusioned. Thinking you were dead changed something in my perspective about you—why did you have to die when I got to live? What right did I have to living when you, unnamed and unloved, but completely innocent, would never get the chance? Then I got older and, still thinking you were dead, I began to realize that no matter how much bad I had to sift through, there was so much good to living that you would never get to experience."

"Under the assumption that I was dead," Ryuko said. Satsuki nodded.

"Right. Under the assumption that you were dead, I knew that I had been given an opportunity at living that you never got. Even though there were things in my life that weren't exactly favorable, I'd experienced color and sound and scent and taste: things I thought you would never know. Things everybody, good, bad, righteous, or indifferent, got to experience. Every person I met, just in greeting, learning their name alone, I knew more about them than I ever knew about you, and I knew that they, too, were able to experience the things that I had, the things that we took for granted as living people."

Ryuko shifted her position again and Satsuki straightened out her legs. They were facing each other now, Ryuko hugging her knees, Satsuki staring at her intently.

"I wasn't really afraid of living or dying," Satsuki continued. "I was convinced that there would be a place for us between one and the other—I was convinced that no fate would be so cruel as to never let me see my sister again. So I wasn't afraid of dying, because in death, I honestly believed that I would be granted the opportunity to be with you."

"So if you believed that, you could have just killed yourself and made your wish come true," Ryuko said, pulling on the hem of Satsuki's shorts. "But you didn't. You stayed and you planned and you wanted to protect the world. And you said I had a hero complex!"

Satsuki lifted one leg and poked Ryuko in the rib with her big toe, quelling the laughter spilling out of her younger sister's mouth, sifting it down to a chuckle. Satsuki shrugged seriously.

"My wish would have come true, but then we wouldn't have had anything to talk about in our suspended purgatory. If we were going to meet, I wanted to tell you about everything that was good. If I had simply thrown my life away, we would have sat for an eternity between my anger and recklessness and helplessness. I didn't want you to think that that was all there was to living."

Ryuko had grabbed at Satsuki foot, fingering the bones in her ankle and sat still, contemplating what Satsuki had said. Her face was screwed up in concentration, trying to find words. Satsuki waited.

"You know, for a long time, in my life, that's all I knew," she said finally, looking up at Satsuki. She let go of Satsuki's foot and started again. "Dad sent me to school and never mentioned that I had a sister. I wondered a lot about what my mother would be like. I got into fights because it would get his attention, but all I felt was anger and recklessness and helplessness; all he did was neglect me. You lost so much and you still believed in good, but I was a kid who fought for attention and ended up pointing the end of a blade at the first person I could lash out at."

It wasn't like she was finished, she just didn't know how to continue, so they say there with the silence stretching between them. It was the quiet between one wave retreating and the other one coming in, the feeling of sand stuck in the under current, sucking, pulling everything in before it was pushed back out, naturally.

"I'm sorry," Satsuki said, after some time. Ryuko quirked her head to one side.

"For what?"

Satsuki swallowed down guilt, pushed it deep within her before she spoke and when she did, she turned her face away from Ryuko, ashamed.

"I gave up thinking that you were still alive, after a while," she said, pausing. "If I knew... If I held onto the thought, I could have had somebody pry into some kind of database, something. It's not like I didn't have the resources."

She thought of Houka at fifteen, unable to drive, still scared and bitter. He would have taken up the task jauntily. Their father could have been thorough, but he was a scientist and not a

computer whiz. Falsifying records and birth certificates seemed to suit his style, but anything deeper would have remained. Satsuki was pulled out of her thoughts by Ryuko's wave of her hand.

"You couldn't have known," she said. She thought for a bit. "I didn't know. I didn't know I had a sister and dad always stuck me in boarding school so it wasn't like I was in a position to ask him questions, let alone think that I had a sister in the first place. I think I should be more sorry. I don't exactly have a notebook full of letters to give to you."

Satsuki smiled then. "No, you don't."

"I mean, all I've really got is..." Ryuko didn't finish but she gestured to herself with a wave of her hand. Satsuki laughed like a bubbling stream. Ryuko was still grinning when she finished.

"You're an idiot," Satsuki said. She reached out, suddenly, and tugged Ryuko's crimson streak. "How are you even real?"

"Maybe I'm not," Ryuko answered in a whisper, twisting and leaning forward until her lips were almost brushing against Satsuki's. "Maybe I'm a ghost. Your hallucination. A fever dream."

"Don't joke like that," Satsuki answered. She frowned but Ryuko shifted, crawled up onto her hands and knees and looked at Satsuki very seriously.

"I'm sorry. I love you."

She leaned toward Satsuki, kissing her, then again, and again, and again, pressing her lips to Satsuki's in the segue between one sentence and the next, as if trying to make up for all the words Satsuki had ever written her that she'd only just received. "I love you. So much. I'm sorry."

"I know, I know. I love you, too," Satsuki answered, tugging Ryuko down with her, drowning them both in a conversation they'd only just begun. The waves of memory broke around them, the crests and troughs of each bleeding from one to another—static in their ears. Each kiss was the tug of the undertow, sucking them both into the torrential current of their intertwined lives, caught in the present, past and future both cast away, useless distractions to the now.

"I love you," Ryuko said again, threading her fingers through Satsuki's hair. "I'll never leave you again." She ghosted her lips above Satsuki's and stared, meaning every word she said.

"I promise."

Satsuki closed the distance, tilting her head up. "Okay."

"You raised me from the dead, sis," she said, nudging Satsuki's nose with her own. They met eyes and Satsuki reached up to cup the shell of Ryuko's ear. Ryuko was pressed against her,

lying half on top of Satsuki. Satsuki felt the faint hammering of her sister's heart against her chest.

"You were never dead."

Ryuko grinned.

"Tell me, Sats. Tell me all the things you saved for us in the land of the living."

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